

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),  
BUILDING NO. 8  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-G

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
6959-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 8  
HABS No. PA-5383-G**

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.  
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants.

Significance:

Building 8's phased construction and multiple functions demonstrate a typical pattern of growth and adaptation found at the Dobson Mill. In addition, the southern elevation along Ridge Avenue is one of the major facades which define and enclose the complex.

## **PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **A. Physical History**

#### **Date(s) of Erection:**

Building 8 was built circa 1875 and extended in 1879 and circa 1887. The Hexamer Surveys from this period document this construction.

#### **Architect:**

Unknown.

#### **Original/Subsequent Owners:**

See Chain of Title.

#### **Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:**

Unknown.

#### **Original Plans/Construction:**

What is today referred to as Building 8, was originally built as a series of smaller structures. On the 1876 Hexamer Survey, Building 8 is shown as four buildings- three, 2-story stone structures with tin roofs and one, 1-story stone building with a gravel roof. The eastern building fronting Ridge Avenue housed the storage space for rugs and a sample room for buyers on the second floor. The building to the west on Ridge Avenue functioned as a dressing, machinist and reeling room on the first floor and a storage space for yarns on the second. The two buildings off Ridge Avenue housed a yarn storage room and a dye house. In addition, there was a small structure attached to these buildings which housed a boiler room and yarn facility. All of these structures were arranged in a "U" shape.

#### **Alterations/Additions:**

By 1879, a building had been constructed which infilled the "U" shape. This building was joined with the dyehouse to its north under a single gable roof with a monitor and had an open second floor. The building functioned as a spooling and weaving room and an oil and grease extracting house. The 1889 Hexamer Survey shows that by that time, Building 8 had expanded with a boiler house to its west. The boilers were housed in 1-story stone buildings with slag roofs. A smoke stack rose above the roofs on the Ridge Avenue

elevation. Two gates opened from Ridge Avenue into this portion of the west parcel of the Dobsons' site.

### **B. Historical Context**

Building 8 was constructed as a number of buildings circa 1875. This was a time when the mill was rapidly expanding with the capacities for carpet production. The buildings housed functions related to this line of textiles. The role of the Dobsons at this time in their community, as well as the image they wished to transmit, is evident in the carefully unified composition of the elevation fronting on Ridge Avenue.

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement**

#### **Architectural Character:**

The architectural character of Building 8 is that of the rubblestone construction typical to the site. This building is distinguished however by its twentieth-century modernization which gave it a reinforced concrete structure and brick soldier course window lintels.

#### **Condition of Fabric:**

The masonry is in generally sound condition with some mortar erosion.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

#### **Overall Dimensions:**

E elev.-98'; NE elev.-62'; NE elev.-24.4'; N. elev.-175'; NE elev.-45.8'; W elev.-40.6'; S elev.-46'; SW elev.-246'.

#### **Foundations:**

Rubblestone.

#### **Walls:**

Rubblestone with barn dash mortar. East elevation rests on a high basement and terminates to the north in a low spur wall treated as a buttress. North elevation is composed of three elements, a one-story wall which is stuccoed rubble construction and partially obscured by a metal shed, a central section of two stories, exposed rubble capped with a brick corbel

cornice and terra cotta tile coping, and a western section exposed only at the top of the second story and sharing a common wall with Building 9. The south elevation, constructed in 1877-1879, has a rubble wall of two stories. To the west is a two-story rubble annex, recently stuccoed. This elevation is capped by a brick corbel parapet.

Structural System/Framing:

Masonry construction with heavy timber columns, framing and trusses, reinforced in the twentieth century with concrete framing.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

None.

Chimneys:

The smoke stack shown in Hexamer surveys in the late nineteenth century was removed c.1919.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

East elevation- wooden double-leaf entrance doors under a segmental brick arch reached by a metal staircase. North elevation- at eastern end, pair of cross-braced double leaf doors within a loading bay and above a rubble loading platform. South elevation- westernmost two bays house garage entrances and a central bay has been altered to form a door opening.

Windows/Shutters:

East elevation- original basement windows capped by brick soldier courses have been infilled with plywood, other windows are partially infilled or contain industrial steel sash or modern double-hung wood sash. North elevation- first floor openings are primarily infilled or altered, second story openings have been infilled with stucco surrounding modern 6/6 double hung sash, in western section 6/6 double-hung sash are visible. South elevation- fourteen bays, first floor- tripartite deteriorated steel windows with fixed transoms capped with soldier course brick lintels, second floor- partially infilled now containing single wooden 6/6 sash, brick soldier course lintels remain. There is a roof top clerestory above the eastern section of the building.

Roof:

The three sections of Building 8 are capped with differing roof types. The eastern portion has a gabled roof with a clerestory-like monitor with fixed wood sash windows. The central section has a flat roof which was built after 1945. The western portion has a low pitched gable roof.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

Roughly rectangular interior space, ground floor used for storage, divided by partitions; second floor used as a machine shop with an office in the east end.

Stairways:

Stairwell in eastern end of building.

Flooring: Concrete.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

Rough plaster finishes over rubble walls and cinder block. Ceilings with exposed truss systems, timber planking and clerestory.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

No notable window trim or details.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation through clerestory and by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts or air conditioning units .

Lighting: Modern and strip fluorescent, ceiling-mounted, lighting.

Plumbing: Early-20th-century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

**D. Site**

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 8 sits on the southwestern edge of the west parcel of the Dobson site with a primary elevation fronting on Ridge Avenue. The building's prominent location on Ridge Avenue near the entrance to the complex, accounts for the carefully composed south elevation and lesser elevations on the interior of the site. The end of the building is wedged between Buildings 10 and 9A, an indication of the incremental construction of the structure.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.